


Approved for Release
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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
OFFICE OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

HUMAN RESOURCES (HR) BULLETIN # 044, FY06

SUBJECT: Application Acceptance and Processing

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon release of this HR Bulletin

SUPERSEDES: N/A

BACKGROUND: 5 CFR 300 prescribes minimum requirements for employment practices in the competitive service. The Delegated Examining Operations Handbook (DEOH) provides guidance on procedures for filling vacancies in accordance with the laws and regulations.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this HR Bulletin is to establish Department-wide policy for the acceptance and processing of applications under competitive examining and merit assignment procedures.

Standard Application Procedures: For bureaus using manual and automated hiring systems, to facilitate timely filling vacant positions, completed applications (including all requested supplemental documentation) should be received in the HR office by the closing date of the announcement. The DEOH includes a table of exceptions.

For applicants who requested an alternative application package on or before the closing date of the announcement, bureaus should establish policies for receipt of those applications that do not place an undue burden on the applicant, but still place accountability for timely submitting a complete application package with the applicant.

Alternative Application Procedures: For alternative applications accepted manually to accommodate applicants without access to automated hiring systems, in lieu of an automated application, bureaus may establish policy for accepting and inputting applications that facilitate timely receipt and input of the application and evaluation of all applicants; for example, bureaus might consider one of the following options:

- collect an application that may be scanned into the automated hiring tool;
- recommend the applicant use the IT resources at a local organization such as a public library, community center, college or university prior to the announcement closing date;
- invite the applicant to input his/her application at the location of the servicing HR Office prior to the announcement closing date; or
- alternatively, an HR staff member may input the applicant's information on behalf of the applicant; however, bureaus should carefully consider implementing this option, as inputting errors on the part of the HR staff member could have a negative impact on the applicant's outcome.

While vacancy announcements and verbal discussions should encourage applicants to submit electronic applications, they should also clearly explain alternative procedures to applicants or provide the name of a contact with whom alternative procedures can be discussed.

Application Format: Bureaus may accept applicant work history in any format provided it provides sufficient information for an HR staff member to make determinations regarding the applicant's eligibility and qualifications for the position. For bureaus using automated systems, an appropriate resume template should be incorporated into the system. Regardless of the format requested, the vacancy announcement must clearly specify what information is required to receive consideration.

Complete Applications: Bureaus may establish policies regarding acceptance of completed applications, to include minimum submission requirements and the effects of not receiving a complete application; for example, an application may be considered incomplete if an applicant:

- does not submit a required form or other material, as specified in the job announcement;
- fails to respond to questions that he or she must answer before any action can be taken; or
- submits insufficient information concerning education or experience.

HR offices may rate incomplete applications based on the information provided, or may ask the applicant to furnish the missing information. However, regardless the option chosen, it *must be applied consistently for all applicants* for any specific position or competitor inventory.

Vacancy announcements should clearly state all documents required as well as the impact of the failure if an applicant fails to submit a complete application by the established date.

Supplemental Documentation: Supplemental documentation, is any documentation other than a resume, used by the HR office to determine the eligibility for consideration or qualifications of an applicant such as: school transcripts; DD-214-Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, SF-50-Notification of Personnel Action;

Performance Evaluation; Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSAs)/Competency Statements.

Bureaus may establish alternative policy on deadlines for receipt of supplemental documentation, whether documentation must be received by the closing date of the announcement or whether it is required at a later date, but should consider the impact of certifying applicants to management without receiving documentation confirming they meet the criteria for certification. The ultimate goal for HR is to forward management a desirable number of eligible and highly qualified applicants.

Exceptions: In some instances, an applicant wishing to receive preference points may not have a DD-214 available to verify this proof; bureaus should follow the guidance issued in the DEOH in developing policies for adjudicating preference for such individuals.

Case Documentation: All cases should be documented with the relevant initiating documents (e.g., SF-52, SF-39 and relevant e-mail requests), job analyses, position descriptions, rating schedules/crediting plans; Office Personnel Management (OPM) qualification standards or approved modified qualification standard. For manually processed applications, an applicant listing describing, at a minimum, the names all applicants requesting consideration for the position and the grade and occupational series of the position for which consideration is requested, must be maintained in the staffing case file. Additionally, copies of correspondence to the applicant, including status notification, must be filed with the application.

Postmarks: For manually processed applications, bureaus have flexibility in establishing the date by which applications are received in the HR office (e.g., by the closing date of the announcement; within 5 days of the closing date of the announcement; must be postmarked by the closing date of the announcement etc.). When a postmark is used as the basis for determining if an application was submitted on time, HR Offices should not issue a certificate until at least 5 business days after the closing date. This will allow for a reasonable period in which to receive applications postmarked by the closing date. Any application that bears a timely postmark should be properly annotated with the postmark date to allow for case file reconstruction. Applications postmarked after the closing date of the announcement should be documented and the postmarked envelope maintained with the application for reconstruction purposes.

Exceptions: Veterans and certain other applicants may file an application for a vacancy after the closing date of the announcement. Bureaus should adhere to guidance in the DEOH, which states the criteria that must be met.

Confirmation of Receipt of Application: For positions advertised via an automated hiring system or manually, applicants must receive confirmation that an application has been received and that they will be advised later of their status.

Assessing Applicants: Based on the applications submitted, applicants will be evaluated on whether they meet eligibility and minimum qualifications criteria including any selective placement factors. Applicants found to meet both will be further evaluated on the extent to which they possess the KSAs, and other characteristics competencies of the position.

Bureaus are encouraged to implement the use of more than one assessment tool in evaluating qualified applicants. For example, in addition to the rating schedule incorporated in the on-line application, a structured interview, and a work sample may be used to further assess and narrow the applicant pool. The DEOH outlines the requirements for the use of alternative assessment tools. All assessment methods must be described in the vacancy announcement advertising the position.

Automated Hiring Systems: Applicant qualifications will be evaluated by the responsible HR staff member and any designated technical expert panel as needed. Inappropriately high ratings not supported by the application submitted will be adjusted to reflect the true rating for the applicant; the case file will be noted with justification for the adjustment for audit purposes.

Manual Hiring: Applicant qualifications will be evaluated against the pre-established rating schedule by the responsible HR staff member and any designated technical expert panel as needed. An applicant's total application, including all KSA responses, relevant work history, education, volunteer activities, etc., will be considered during the evaluation and a rating determined accordingly. Panel members should be advised of and certify having been informed of the confidentiality of the evaluation process. Completed rating sheets should be collected, reviewed, and filed in the staffing case file. The responsible DEU certified HR staff member will use the panel results (along with the results of any other assessment tool) to rate and rank applications submitted for consideration under competitive procedures. Applicants falling within the best-qualified group will be certified to the selecting official in accordance with the DEOH.

Based on knowledge of the needs of the selecting official, past experience, or other pertinent factors, HR offices may consider certifying more than the top three applicants; for example, where two or more vacancies exist or are anticipated, the delegated examining office may certify three applicants and two additional applicants for each additional vacancy. HR offices may also consider certifying all tied scores when that score is within reach and allowing the selecting official to break the tie through name requests.

For applications submitted for consideration under merit assignment procedures, those procedures will be used to refer qualified applicants.

Acting on Certificates: Referral lists should document actions for each certified eligible in accordance with the DEOH.

Objections to Eligibles: A selecting official has the right to object to any eligible referred to him; however, objections will be sustained only if they are based on proper and adequate reasons. The decision to uphold or deny a request should recognize both the needs of the agency and the basic principles of the merit system.

Non-Preference Eligibles: Bureau HR offices are responsible for adjudicating objections for non-preference eligibles in accordance with established bureau policy.

Preference Eligibles 30 Percent or More Disabled (CPS): OPM retains exclusive authority to make medical determinations pertaining to preference eligibles (5 CFR Part 339), and grant or deny an agency's passover request of a preference eligible with a compensable service connected disability of 30% or more (5 U.S.C. § 3318). Refer to HR Bulletin # 001, FY05, Process for Adjudicating Cases Involving Preference Eligibles, for procedures on requesting passover of a compensably disabled veteran of 30 percent or more.

Preference Eligibles Less Than 30 Percent Disabled: Bureau HR Offices are responsible for adjudicating passover requests of veterans who are less than 30 percent disabled. Passover requests must be submitted and adjudicated in accordance with established bureau policy. Decisions granting a passover must be reported to the Director for Human Resources Management in accordance with HR Bulletin # 001, FY05, Process for Adjudicating Cases Involving Preference Eligibles. Additional guidance on objecting to eligibles is included in the DEOH.

An eligible that is objected to by an appointing official may be removed from consideration on a certificate **only after** the objection has been sustained.

Three Bona Fide Considerations: Applicants not selected from a certificate after three bona fide considerations may be removed for consideration from that certificate. Reminder: a bona fide consideration requires that a selection is made from the certificate.

Competitor Inventories: Bureaus may wish to consider this alternative when advertising vacancies in an occupation frequently filled with non-status applicants and when it is not efficient to recruit and examine for each position filled. Bureaus should consider the impact of using this method, as the maintenance requirements are considerably greater than case examining. Guidance for establishing competitor inventories is included in the DEOH.

Auditing Certificates: Auditing is the process of certifying the action taken on a returned certificate of eligibles by the selecting official to comply with legal and regulatory selection procedures. Certificates should be audited within 3 days of return from a selecting official. Specifically, for positions advertised under competitive examining procedures, DEU staff must evaluate the certificate for proper selections, i.e., Is the certificate properly documented for each eligible? If an applicant(s) were removed from consideration, was this proper? Was the applicant(s) selected within reach? Were

three bona fide considerations granted? Were veterans' preference rules followed? Were applicants eligible for priority consideration selected?

Issuing Notices of Results: Upon return of referral lists from a selecting official and within 45 days of the close of a vacancy announcement, applicants should receive notice of their status for the position. The HR staff is encouraged to continually update staffing case files, automated and manual, to facilitate meeting the notice requirements.

Reconsideration of Ratings: Bureaus should establish a procedure by which an applicant may appeal his/her rating for a position for which he has requested consideration. Applicant reconsideration requests should be handled as follows:

Applicant Responsibility:

- The applicant's request should be made in writing and should indicate why the applicant believes the original decision was not proper.

HR Office Responsibilities:

- The office that made the original decision will conduct the first level of review.
- A staff member other than the person who made the original decision must conduct a review.
- Develop a written response to the request containing a full explanation of the reasons for the decision, without compromising the rating schedule.
- Evaluate the application and issue a response to the applicant as soon as practicable (e.g., bureaus might consider establishing policy to respond within 30 days).
- Establish a written appeals process, including a second level appeal within the bureau.

REFERENCES: 5 CFR 300; Delegated Examining Operations Handbook, HR Bulletin # 001, FY05, Process for Adjudicating Cases Involving Preference Eligibles

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